

Evening News 26 April 1922

BILL'S BIG JOB

Building City Railway

HOW POLITICS INTERFERED

No Government Stroke

Anyone suggesting go-slowism on a Government job under Bill Farrow would be told: "Go to blithering blazes" by the tamest menial. Mr William Farrow has been in charge of big State undertakings for years. He is a man of proved capacity and leadership. But everybody calls him Bill, even the austere Chief Railway Commissioner.

Bill is construction boss at the Liverpool-street station of the City Railway. He has turned a placid spot into a fiery furnace of energy belching black, suffocating smoke, throwing up clouds of yellow dust from the picks of a hundred workmen, raising sweat from the straining teams harnessed to ploughs.

He has a tidy table and a nice room on the job, with files and clean blotting paper and a mat at the doorway to wipe his dusty boots. But they do well who get him there in the morning for a few minutes to sign necessary papers. There is always something down in the bowels of the excavation to claim his attention.

And that is the man accused of suffering the Government stroke on his job: accused by a large employer who related his observations to this paper on Friday.

PRIVATE v. STATE ENTERPRISE.

Our informant said that he had frequently timed the loading of an ordinary tip dray with loose earth, prepared and ready for the shovel. From an average struck by him he found that it took six men five minutes to load a dray – the usual load of which is one cubic yard of soil estimated to weigh a ton. Most of the men, he added, had only recently left the ranks of the unemployed. He drew a

comparison between the carters employed on the railway works and those engaged on the excavations for the foundations of the new Manchester Unity Hall, which runs through from Elizabeth-street to Castlereagh-street. Here, he declared, one man puts on a load in seven minutes in spite of the fact that he had to break the earth down.

That read like a damning indictment of Bill, his men and methods. There was more than a suggestion that behind the big fence something like a holiday was progressing under State auspices at the expense of the super-taxed public. The smoke and the dust curling above the enclosure, as well as the long procession of drays were so much camouflage. So the Chief Railway Commissioner, who is a friend of Bill's in a business way, invited the "Evening News" to stroll in unannounced.

BILL AND OTHERS

The first man encountered in the office had on an old felt hat, soft collar, and very dusty boots. Indeed, he looked as if he had just rolled in the dust with the relish of a retriever pup, just bathed. In came another, not as bad on appearances, straight form a nice big, carpeted room in one of the departments. To him the "News" man was referred.

"Now," he began, "in America, they wd---

"Never mind about America," the "News" man rejoined. "A man in Sydney says you are going slow on this job."

"If the public would only come and see what's going on before they talk," he proceeded, "they-----

"But they can't, answered the reporter. "You have built a big fence round yourselves and nailed up a no-admittance sign. In any case, we outside, who pay for the job, don't consider you a Brahmin cast, above criticism. The 'Evening News' is on the scene to see whether you deserve it."

At this stage the silent fellow in the working togs left.

“Who’s he?” the reporter asked.

“Bill – Bill Farrow.” Was the reply of the other, Mr Burrow, our spruce departmental-looking friend, superintendent engineer of this particular section of the City railway, and a man who has done big things.

Subsequently, when we two went outside, we saw through the dust cloud our office friend of the previous hour, buried in the midst of the turmoil. “Slow down under him,” someone observed sarcastically; and the “News” man’s ears rang with a scornful “go to blithering blazes.”

He went down into the depth of the dusty cut, and saw the men at work; timed them, too. It took five men about two minutes to load a dray and get it off, and they only let up while the next pushed in. Certainly many of them were recruited from the ranks of the unemployed. But Bill Farrow reckons them as good as any he ever had, and he ought to know good men.

Plainly these honest strivers had been victims of economic depression. Their record, considered in conjunction with that of the job, is a proud one. Slowing down is not consistent with facts and figures.

NOT TOO BAD

The excavations for the Liverpool-street station are now proceeding in an organised way. The plant consists of modern electric cranes and a steam navy. The material is handled by tip drays and a fleet of petrol and steam waggons. From 1400 to 1500 loads are sent away daily. The drays travel 22 miles a day, and the officers reckon that this isn’t bad for a “go-slow” job. Under the worst conditions, labour cost was well below the departmental estimate, and left the original Norton Griffiths figures stranded. The supervising engineer keeps a close tab on costs.

Since February 20 45,000 tons have been shifted.

The soil is being taken to Darling Harbor, portion of which is being filled in.

The arrival of modern dragline excavators by the Makura is being eagerly awaited. Then better records will be registered. Had the experts been given due notice the plant would have been in working order. But the railways were made a matter of political expediency. Therefore, taking most things into consideration, Bill has by no means fallen down on his big job, so far.